



## Attachment E

# ***HEALTH CONNECT AND RESOURCE CENTRE***

# Introduction to the Health Connect and Resource Centre Preliminary Concept

## Purpose

The Health Connect and Resource Centre (HCRC) has the following objectives:

- To enhance access to programs, services and supports with a focus on the daytime unhoused population.
- To address the underlying issues which may be contributing to homelessness.
- To enhance health outcomes, including related to mental health and substance use.
- To act as a resource for those who have realized shelter and housing in order to maintain it.
- To reduce impacts of homelessness, mental health and substance use on residents and businesses by bringing people inside and addressing their diverse needs.
- To contribute to enhanced collaboration, communication and coordination among faith-based, non-profit and Provincial organizations and teams mandated to address the three crises, which will enhance service provision.

The HCRC will also address the needs of those who are at high- or imminent-risk of homelessness through the provision of resource information, navigation assistance, outreach support and referral services thus reducing the number of people falling into homelessness.

## Background

The Health Connect and Resource Centre (HCRC), is based on extensive research and consultation, including with people with lived and living experience. It builds off of the City's Homelessness Action Strategy (July 2022), which included the following action: "That the City advocate that the Province fund a 24/7 drop-in and resource centre which would enhance service coordination and provide access to emergency food; information and referral services; and laundry, shower and toilet facilities." Of note, the strategy directly engaged 81 people with lived and living experience of homelessness. Its development was also informed by the Community Action Network, which are people with lived and living experience of homelessness and poverty who have been involved in a seven session training program to inform City plans, policies, practices and services. In 2023, this initiative received a Planning Institute of BC Gold Award in Planning Practice.

The HCRC also builds on the 2023 Point-in-Time Homeless Count, particularly its emphasis on the vision, concept, design and program being culturally-safe, trauma-informed and responsive to the needs of Indigenous peoples. Of note, this count, which was based on surveys with 203 respondents, found that Indigenous people represented 43% of the enumerated unsheltered homeless population but just 3.1% of the total population in New Westminster.

Additionally, the HCRC builds on the City's 2023 Mental Health Roundtable, which was attended by over 40 participants representing every organization and team with a mandate to address mental health and the related issues of homelessness and substance use. The

participants, based on their daily interactions with people with lived or living experience, identified the most significant need, which was almost unanimous, as a HCRC or hub facilitating collaboration and coordination and providing an array of programs, services and supports.

### **Demand for the Health Connect and Resource Centre**

The city is facing increasing homelessness. The 2023 Point-in-Time Homeless Count found 57 unsheltered and 146 sheltered homeless in New Westminster. Combined, there were 203 unsheltered and sheltered homeless, which represented a 65% increase between 2020 and 2023. Regarding the sheltered homeless number, it is misleading as it is significantly bolstered by the nightly shelter, with those using it being unsheltered between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm. On the night of the count, 63 people were using this shelter, which offers minimal support services. As such, the daytime unsheltered homeless number was at least 120 people.

Based on the count for New Westminster, 61% of the unsheltered and 33% of the sheltered homeless self-reported a mental health issue. Additionally, 78% of the unsheltered and 25% of the sheltered homeless self-reported some form of addiction. The discrepancies in these self-reported health conditions speak to the importance of enhanced access to shelter and support services.

Based on the count, Indigenous people represented 43% of the enumerated unsheltered and 12% of enumerated sheltered but just 3.1% of the total population in New Westminster. The discrepancy may indicate that shelter and support services are not culturally-safe, trauma-informed and responsive to their needs.

### **Compassionate Understanding Approach**

The Health Connect and Resource Centre (HCRC) will provide a first point of contact for the daytime unhoused population. It will be a welcoming, inviting and inclusive space where the unhoused can come inside, feel comfortable, and are free to relax. Care will be taken to ensure that the space does not feel institutional and that it adequately represents the diversity of the population it serves, including related to amenities, art, food, music, programming, staffing and training. There will be prominent Indigenous underpinnings based on consultation with First Nations and Indigenous organizations and people.

The HCRC will take a compassionate, culturally-safe and trauma-informed approach to addressing the needs of people who are unhoused and living with mental health and substance use issues. This will include gender diverse populations, which are people who demonstrate a diversity of expression beyond the binary framework. This will be achieved through research on promising practices related to gender diversity, particularly with regard to services and supports for the unhoused, and consultation with organizations serving this population, and with people with lived and living experience. This research and consultation will inform the vision, concept, design and program of the HCRC, ensuring that it is welcoming, inclusive and responsive of the needs of this population, as well as addressing current gaps.

## **Indigenous Programming**

The Health Connect and Resource Centre (HCRC) will be designed and programmed to meet the needs of Indigenous people who are experiencing homelessness and living with mental health and substance use issues. This will be achieved through consultation with First Nations and Indigenous organizations and people, including those with lived and living experience of homelessness. This will be essential given the over-representation of Indigenous people amongst the unsheltered homeless (43%) in New Westminster and the high percentage who have experienced or who have a family member who has experienced residential schools (58%). By ensuring the design and programming are culturally-safe, holistic and trauma-informed, this will facilitate access to services and supports.

## **Health Connect and Resource Centre Services**

The Health Connect and Resource Centre (HCRC) will be the first point of contact for the unhoused and will act as a bridge between being unhoused and being sheltered or housed. It will enable the unhoused to meet their needs rather than spending their day trying to keep warm or cool, accessing food, or realizing shelter or housing. The centre will equip guests with the ability to make a more seamless transition to being sheltered or housed, and to maintain their shelter or housing. It will also be a resource to them during and after this transitional period.

The HCRC recognizes the inter-relationship between homelessness and mental health and substance use, with the latter two issues being significant contributing factors to not being able to maintain one's employment or housing, and becoming homeless. As such, it provides an array of services that address a range of contributing factors to homelessness.

The HCRC will rely on collaboration and coordination between a wide spectrum of service providers from faith-based, non-profit and Provincial organizations and teams. It will address the needs of the daytime unhoused population and will have a health and wellness focus. It will address hygiene and sanitation needs, including access to laundry facilities showers and toilets; provide meal programming and nutritional advice; accommodate clinical and non-clinical support teams such as the Assertive Community Treatment Team, the Integrated Homelessness Action Response Team, the Peer Assisted Care Team and the Substance Use Services Access Team. It will offer primary care and substance use services, including harm reduction; and provide resource information, navigation assistance, referral services and outreach support for services such as housing access and income assistance. It will provide a pathway for education and life skills development with the possibility of a supported employment program whereby the unhoused are trained, including receiving Food Safe certification, to prepare and serve meals. It will provide a safe place to meet community connections. It will be culturally-safe, trauma-informed and responsive to a wide array of needs, with an emphasis on Indigenous people and racialized community members and will be supported by the First Nations Health Authority and other Indigenous organizations.

## **Synergy with Service Providers**

The Health Connect and Resource Centre (HCRC) will facilitate collaboration, communication and coordination amongst service providers given the co-location of programs, services and supports. This will help ensure that needs and gaps are being addressed. It will also facilitate relationship building and trust amongst service providers, which will assist with case management and referrals.

Service providers to those experiencing homelessness or living with mental health and substance use issues will be better able to access the daytime unhoused population and serve them in a comfortable, culturally-safe setting. This will make relationship and trust building much easier, and better ensure that there is proper case management and follow-up. Regarding the latter, this is difficult when unhoused people are dispersed throughout the city, and are constantly on the move in an attempt to keep warm or cool, locate food, and realize shelter. Through co-location, service providers also experience relationship and trust building and this contributes to enhanced collaboration, communication and coordination; all of which help to ensure increased capacity and improved service delivery to unhoused people, including those living with mental health and substance use issues.

## **Partnerships**

The Health Connect and Resource Centre (HCRC) will have a health and wellness focus, and will seek partnerships with BC Housing, the Fraser Health Authority, the First Nations Health Authority, and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. As noted previously, it will provide access to the Assertive Community Treatment Team, the Integrated Homelessness Action Response Team, the Peer Assisted Care Team, the Substance Use Services Access Team and an Integrated Case Management Team, if the latter is formed in New Westminster.